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English language teaching practices at the tertiary level of Bangladesh: A public university alumni's feedback

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ABSTRACT

This study aims at exploring the problems and challenges faced by the students in the long English language teaching practices of the Department of English, Islamic University, Bangladesh, and the achievable modifications recommended by its alumni to ensure pragmatic English language teaching at the universities of Bangladesh. Both qualitative and quantitative or mixed-method approach was applied and a total of 21 alumni of various academic years from 2010 to 2012 (12 Years) of the Department of English at Islamic University, Bangladesh participated in the study. The findings of the study revealed that majority of the participants, after completing the graduation and post-graduation in English, failed to develop their English language skills at the advanced level due to the lack of some crucial issues, like particular course and test on specific skills (Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing), effective course design and teaching approach, learner-expected professional dedication of the English language teachers, practice and feedback session, and the use of technological devices in the language classroom and language lab in the English language teaching practices. The study suggests that at least one particular course and test for each English language skills and more practice-oriented ELT courses should be added to the syllabus, and the language teachers should be more serious concerning course design, class activities, effective testing, feedback, use of technology-based classroom, blended learning approach, group discussion and implementation of specific as well as experience-based teaching approach to English language teaching.

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1. Introduction

The English language teaching practice at universities of Bangladesh is, in fact, closely connected with the colonial history as British colonial rulers instituted English language teaching only for serving their own purposes. But by coincidence, Bangladeshi people are benefitted by English teaching and learning the in many ways. Obaidul (2010) mentioned that, “the spread of English, the phenomenon of globalization and their reciprocity have brought immense opportunities as well as challenges for developing nations”. Tsang (1999) also stated that English language skills are pivotal in response to globalization. This is because, Amin (2019) ensured that all the English departments of

public and private universities of Bangladesh has been serving the purpose. But recently the teaching pedagogy of these departments is being relentlessly affected due to different kinds of changes in the social and academic fields of the country. It is a stitch in time for the English departments of the universities of our country to take proper initiatives to address problems faced by the students. Again, Amin (2019) revealed four major problems in the English language teaching practices of the department of English at the universities of Bangladesh. These are as follows: (1) the lack of linguistic competence of students; (2) the inappropriateness of syllabuses; (3) the inappropriateness of teaching methodology; and (4) the lack of teachers' training and their research activities. On the other hand, most of the students who admit themselves into the department of English of universities are found to be linguistically poor. Thus, they are unable to bear the subject load (Islam et al., 2021). To mention the reason, Alam (2001) stated, "... something had gone drastically wrong with the English being taught in our school and colleges: the majority of the students coming into the department from these institutions were unable to read, write, or speak English with any fluency." Again, the practice of learner's autonomy at the universities has become a radical model in today's language teaching realm (Hossain & Mustapha (2020). The running old practices in language teaching at the university level exerted obstacles and challenges to encourage students to be autonomous (Gach, 2020). Likewise, Hasan (2020) states that assessment and feedback at the universities of Bangladesh are "parts and parcels of English language teaching". But the study finds conflicting findings regarding English language assessment. Students complained that they did not receive feedback from their teachers continuously while many teachers mentioned that they provided the students with feedback. This study also finds that assessment in the English foundation courses at the public universities has also been constricted in a particular structure. Another study by Rahman et al. (2011) divulged that the important pedagogical initiative feedback in the English language classes is, in truth, not regular. Kabir (2011) mentioned negative washback effects of tests confirming that the university students' learning is affected by the negative washback and stresses.

The present studies concerning English language teaching practices at the tertiary level of Bangladesh cannot explore all the problems faced by the students for a long time and the modifications to address them. But this study will investigate all the problems and obstacle faced by the students of the department of English at a public university of Bangladesh and modifications suggested by the alumni to solve the problems as it will collect data from 21 alumni who had graduated in between 2010 to 2022 (12 Years) from the department of English, Islamic University, Bangladesh. This study will contribute a lot to the existing literature because it will find the long-term problems faced by the students of the department of English of a public university of Bangladesh and the modifications. It will be very important for English language teaching practices of all of the public and private universities of Bangladesh as still the old lecture-based or teacher-based English language teaching approaches are being practiced at many public and private universities of Bangladesh.

Thus, the objectives of the research include

- (i) Exploring the English language teaching practices at a public university of Bangladesh for more than a decade (12 Years).

- (ii) Understanding the overall problems and challenges faced by students of English language learning at the university.
- (iii) Recommending achievable considerations from the alumni's points of view to ensure pragmatic English language teaching at the universities of Bangladesh.

2. Literature Review

The literature on the problems and the challenges in the long-run English language teaching practices faced by the students of the department of English of the public universities of Bangladesh is scarce though some studies highlight some problems and obstacles as a whole.

Chawdhury (2001) revealed that the students found themselves in a new approach when they faced communicative language teaching at the university as they were not exposed to any specific language skills course in the pre-university years. He also remarked that the first year students felt heavy difficulty in expressing themselves in English though they have a good knowledge concerning sentence structures and grammatical rules and considered overall cultural orientation to the academic atmosphere to be more problematic than the language competence of the students. Likewise, the study of Farooqui (2007) mentioned that the students who admitted themselves into different universities of Bangladesh were somewhat good in writing and reading but verily poor in speaking. Because the English books they had read in the secondary and higher secondary level focused on four skills but only reading and writing skills were assessed in the final examinations. And the most of the teachers blamed the educational system for the students' lack of courage to speak in front of others in class and outside of the class because they had no so many chances to interact with their classmates and even the family members.

Again, there were some reasons for low speaking skills of the students at private universities of Bangladesh mentioned by the participants comprised "complex nature of speaking, inappropriate application of instructional methods, teachers' low proficiency in spoken English and controlling behavior, students' psychological factors, sociocultural factors, students' inadequate linguistic resources, L1 interference, and large class size. Remedies suggested by the participant's entail integrating Task-Based Learning (TBL) and Cooperative Learning (CL), making students aware of noticing, learning speaking through listening, teaching collocations, promoting self-regulated learning, and strengthening teacher education" (Islam and Stapa, 2021). Shumin (2002) recommended the teacher to examine some factors 'affecting adult learners' oral communication, components underlying speaking proficiency, and specific skills or strategies used in communication.' The factors Shumin mentioned were age or maturational constraints, aural medium, sociocultural factors, affective factors, components underlying speaking effectiveness, grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence and interactive activities. He suggested that the students of the university should develop interactional exchange among themselves through small talk in target language as it engages them in conversation of target language. According to Hinkel (2006), the use of specific grammar structures in exact context and vocabulary are supportive for the learners to engage themselves in subject-matter and target language learning activities. Again problem-solving and debate in target language prepare learners for actual life communication in an EFL setting. But the

students and teachers who are habituated with teacher-centered learning approach or examination and curriculum constraints or large classes find incongruity between theoretical methods and reality (Miller & Aldred, 2000).

Though few studies examine some problem faced by the students of universities of Bangladesh, there is a lack of robust research on all the problems faced by the students for a long time and the modifications to address them of a long term English language teaching practices in the English department of a specific public university of Bangladesh. But this study will investigate all the problems and obstacles faced by the students of the department of English at a public university of Bangladesh and modifications suggested by the alumni to solve the problems as it will collect data from 21 alumni who had graduated in between 2010 to 2022 (12 years) from the department of English, Islamic University, Bangladesh. This study will contribute a lot to the existing literature because it will find the long-term problems faced by the students of the department of English of a public university of Bangladesh and the modifications. It will be very important for English language teaching practices of all of the public and private universities of Bangladesh as still the old lecture-based or teacher-based English language teaching approaches are being practiced at many public and private universities of Bangladesh.

3. Method

3.1. Introduction

This study aiming the research objects, the problems the learners came across when they studied in the department of English, and the considerations they have to devise, adopts a mixed-method approach conjoining both qualitative and quantitative methodologies on account of accomplishing more inclusive findings on the research problem (O’Cathain et al., 2007).

The qualitative part of the mixed-methodology applied in this research encompasses more than 17 both multiple choice and open-ended questionnaires for the alumni who had graduated in between 2010 to 2022 (12 years) from the department of English, Islamic University, Bangladesh to explore their individual experiences and observations concerning the problems they faced and the opportunities they conceived as they were doing their graduation and post-graduation at university. The motive as well as reason of adopting the qualitative methodology was to gravely apprehend and interpret the detailed data (Haq, 2014). Besides, the study employed the quantitative approach to numerically reveal the labels having indistinguishable responses, and to measure in percentage the participants having certain experiences and observations, and to simplify as well as endorse the estimation (Haq, 2014). Truly, using both qualitative and quantitative methods applied in this research helped to devise anticipated clarification and generalization on the research questions (O’Cathain et al., 2007; Haq, 2014).

3.2. Population Sampling

The population of this research comprises of alumni of various academic years from 2010 to 2012 (12 years) of the Department of English at Islamic University, Bangladesh. The study applied

simple random sampling to select its population. Then, the researcher randomly sent questionnaires, consisted of both open-ended and multiple choice questions for the 30 alumni from the 12 different academic years while 21 of them sent responses of the questionnaires. The study used simple random sampling because it is a neutral approach to gathering the replies from an enormous group (Horton, 2021). Nevertheless, simple random sampling surely have some negative facets because it can be time-consuming and expensive (Horton, 2021). This study made sure that the benefits of the chosen sampling approach and its shortcomings did not affect it.

3.3. Data Collection

I collected qualitative data on the research question from the selected population comprised of the alumni from the 12 different academic years. To get the answers of the research questions, a questionnaire containing 17 both open-ended and multiple choice questions was sent. Since it was, in fact, difficult to reach all the participants in-person, I had to take the help of the various modes of information technology, i. e., Facebook, Messenger, Email, and Cell Phone. I sent the questionnaires to the participants through email or messenger and requested them over cell phone to answer the questions in their earliest convenience. It was, in truth, somewhat difficult to collect the data from the alumni as many of them considered typing the answer to time-consuming. This is because, I had taken appointments and interviewed them through messenger, Zoom App and WhatsApp. This study used open-ended question as participants, in open-ended questionnaire, can provide relatively detailed responses which, to a great extent, address the questions properly (Hyman & Sierra, 2016; Desai & Reimers, 2019). And it also chose Multiple Choice Question (MCQ) to receive faster answer regarding some issues from the participants.

3.4. Data Analysis

The researcher, in mixed-method research, quantitated the collected qualitative data through levelling, categorization and coding. Quantitating denotes to transforming the qualitative data into numerical forms, which has appeared as a foremost way of mixed-method research (Sandelowski et al., 2009). We leveled and categorized identical replies from the participants and decoded them to present numerically the variables and do a comparative investigation (Srnlka & Koeszegi, 2007).

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Results

The alumni participating in the open-ended survey belonged to an English Department of a public university of Bangladesh from 2010 to 2022 (12 academic years) clearly admitted their language proficiency level at the time of entrance into the university. As presented in Figure 1, of 21 participants, nearly 67% of the alumni were, in speaking, beginners while about 33% of the participants were at intermediate level and nobody was at advanced level. Again, 61% of the graduates mentioned that they were beginners in listening whereas 33% of them stated that they were in intermediate level and nearly 5% of the participants were at advanced level at the time of entrance into the

university. Likewise, in reading 71% of the participants were at intermediate level while about 24% of them were beginner and 05 % were at advanced level. In the similar manner, 76% of the alumni divulged that they were at intermediate level while more than 23% of them said that they were beginners and nobody was at advanced level in writing when they admitted themselves into the university.

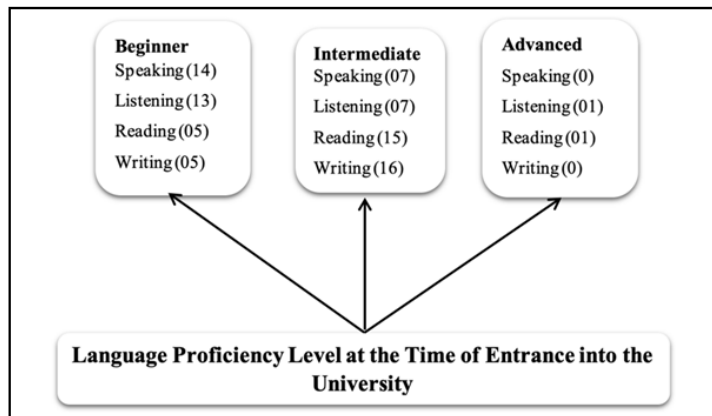


Figure 1: Language proficiency level at the time of entrance into the university

Nearly 70% of the participants in the question of whether language proficiency achievement was the result of their institutional experience or personal effort revealed that their language proficiency achievement was the result of their personal effort. The department or the university has no contribution to develop their language proficiency. One graduate mentioned that the institution doesn't help him much to develop language skills and also added that there were few teachers in the department. Most of them didn't conduct class regularly and literature based teaching-learning got importance rather than language. Besides, 35% of the alumni admitted that their language proficiency achievement was the result of both their institutional and personal efforts. But unfortunately nobody stated that language proficiency was the result of institutional effort. (see Figure 2)

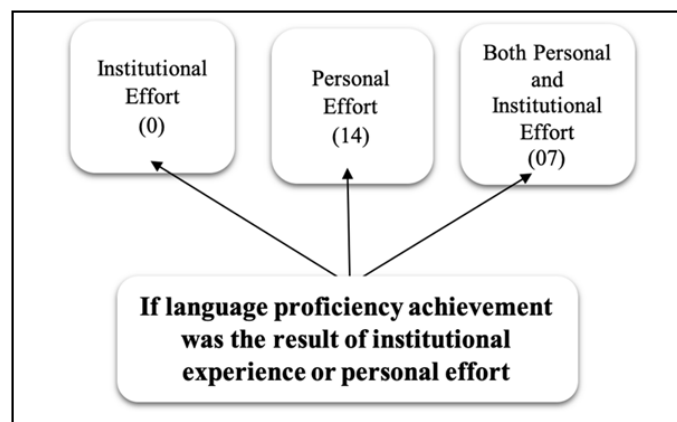


Figure 2. If language proficiency achievement was the result of institutional experience or personal effort

As presented in Figure 3, more than 50% of the alumni divulged that they had language exposures that helped them to a great extent to develop their language skills. Some of the participants mentioned that they talk in English with their friends outside of the classroom. Likewise, they did group study and gave speech in English in different occasions. On the other hand, 48% of them stated that they had no language exposure outside of their classroom.

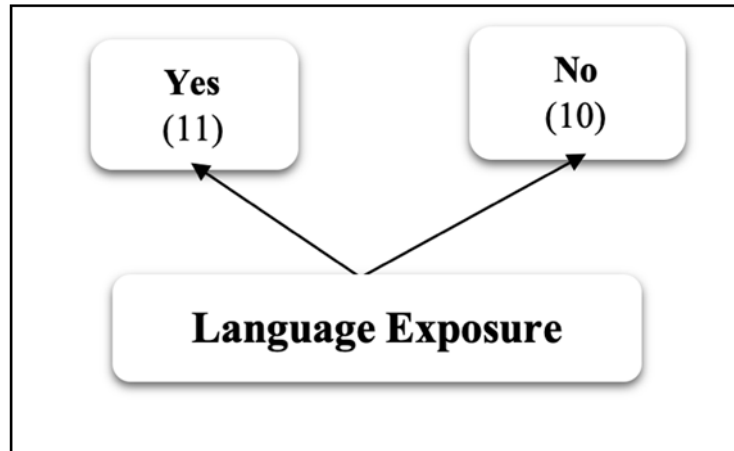


Figure 3. If the students had any language exposure

About 80% of the Alumni as shown in the flow chart acknowledged that the courses they studied at university were insufficient because there was no particular course for specific language skill. Some of the participants added that task based ELT courses, advanced writing and business communication courses and practice oriented courses should be included into the syllabus to develop the language proficiency. But 04 of the 21 participants ensured that that the courses they studied at university were sufficient.

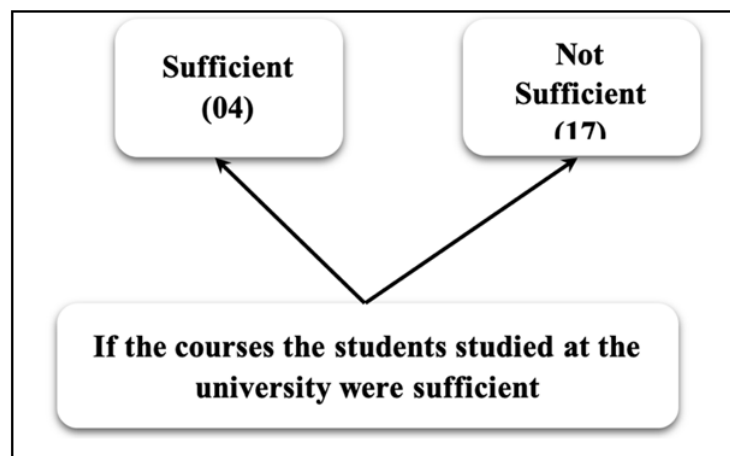


Figure 4: If the courses the students studied at university were sufficient

As shown in Figure 5, nearly 80% of the participants mentioned that there was no specific course to develop speaking skills in syllabus while 04 of them admitted that there was a specific course on speaking skills in syllabus. And 01 of the participants added that his language teacher created atmosphere of speaking in classroom and outside of the classroom. But most of the alumni added that the course design was unclear. Though some classes were conducted on pronunciation, they were not, in fact, effective because of having no practice session.

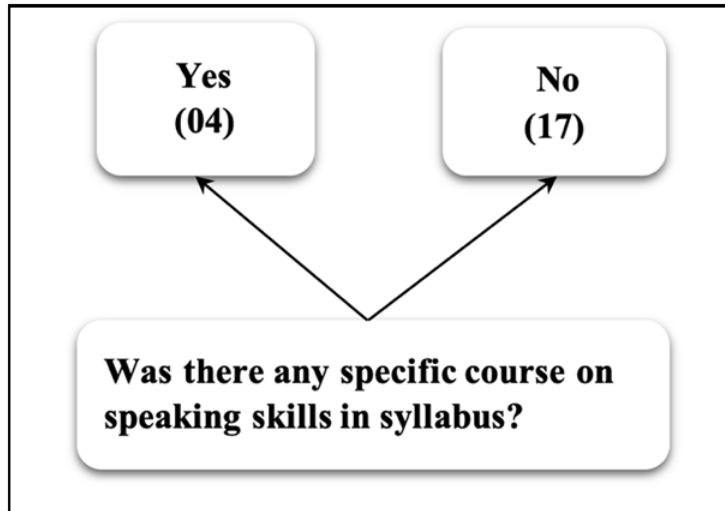


Figure 5. Specific course on speaking skill in syllabus

The alumni (80%) participated in the open ended survey stated that there was no specific course to develop listening skills in syllabus (Figure 6). And 4 of the 21 participants mentioned that there was a specific course on listening skills in syllabus. 01 of them added that it was not clear how the course teacher designed his course.

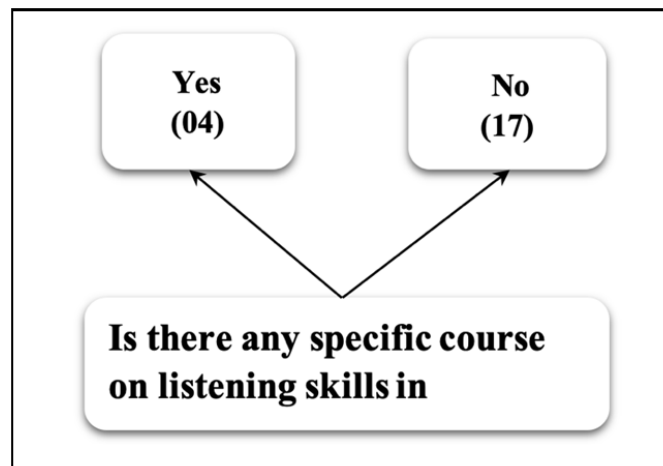


Figure 6. Specific course on listening skill in syllabus and course design

As shown in Figure 7, more than 70% of the participants acknowledged that there was no particular course on reading skills in syllabus while 30% of the alumni admitted that they got specific course on reading skills in their graduation and post-graduation level. They added that the English language teachers designed the course of reading skills by setting some questions on passages, word meanings and open-ended questions, giving lecture and homework. 01 of them said that the way the teacher designed the course was unclear.

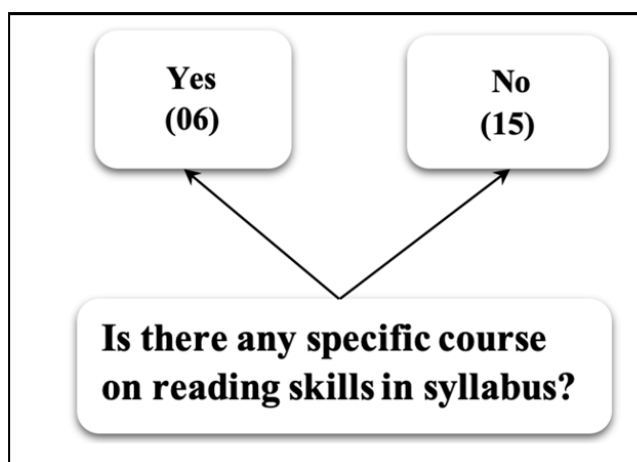


Figure 7. Specific course on reading skills in syllabus and course design

Likewise, about 80% alumni who answered to the questionnaire ensured that there was a particular course on writing skills in their syllabus whereas 04 of the 21 participants said that they studied no specific course on writing skills in their Honors and Master's syllabus (Figure 8). They also mentioned that the teacher designed the writing course by conducting classes on how to write paragraph and composition, answer writing pattern, sentence structures and analysis, different types of professional letters. On the other hand, 01 of the participants complained that no practice session had been arranged to correct grammatically errors sentences written by the students.

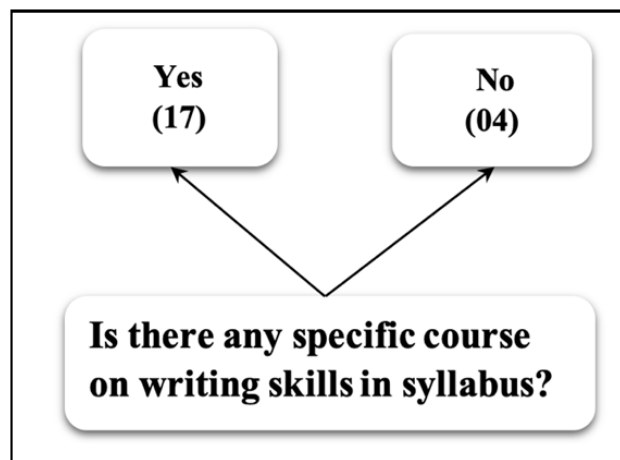


Figure 8. Specific course on writing skills in syllabus and course design

About 90% of the alumni in the question of if English language teachers used technological devices to develop English language skills clearly stated that no language teacher used technological devices in language class though it was very essential to use technological devices to develop English language skills particularly speaking and listening skills. They also revealed that they used their mobiles and internet to practise English outside of the classroom. Only 10% of them mentioned that the teacher used laptop and multimedia projector in language classroom. (see Figure 9)

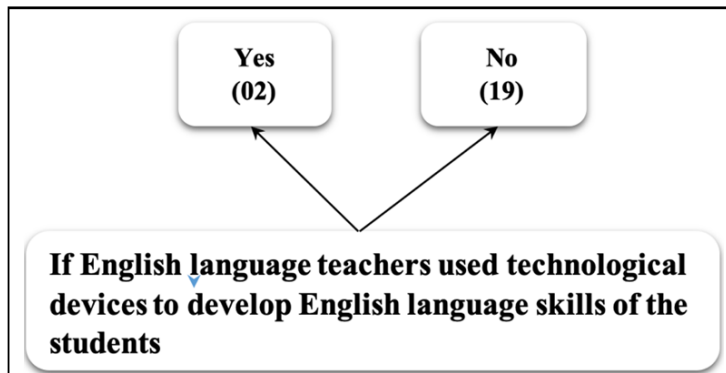


Figure 9. If English language teachers used technological devices to develop English language skills of the students

Again, 90% of the alumni admitted that they were, after completing Honors and masters in English, dissatisfied with the course design and teaching approach for developing speaking and listening skills (Figure 10). They also mentioned the reasons why they were dissatisfied. They stated that no steps had been taken to develop speaking and listening skills and teaching approaches are not effective. Similarly, the teacher didn't make plan to execute any particular method for speaking and listening skills. Having no particular courses and assessment for speaking and listening skills, no usage of language lab and less scope for practice English in the classroom were, in fact, important causes for their dissatisfaction. 10% of them were satisfied with the course design and teaching approach for developing speaking and listening skills.

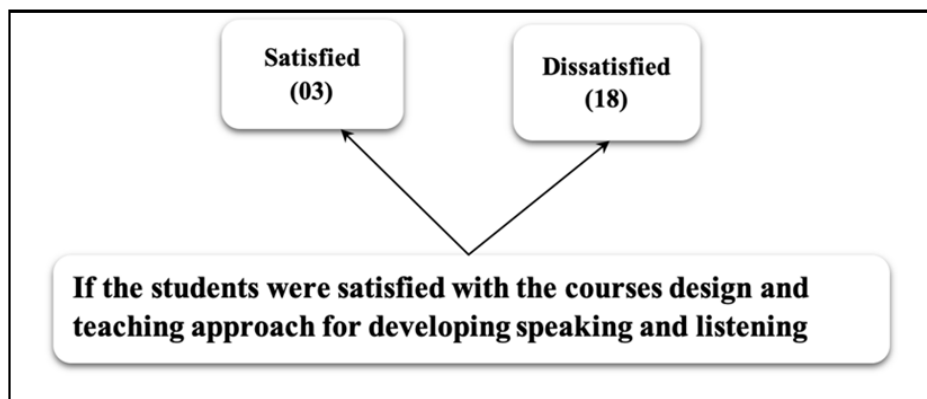


Figure 10. If the students were, after completing Honors and masters in English , satisfied with the course design and teaching approach for developing speaking and listening skills

The alumni's responses regarding if they were, after completing Honors and Masters in English, satisfied with the courses design and teaching approach for developing reading and writing skills revealed clear distinction, for 90% of them disclosed that they were dissatisfied with the course design and teaching approach for developing reading and writing skills because of having no strategies, practice work, instructions and particular course on reading skills. On the other hand, 10% of the participants were satisfied with the course design and teaching approach for developing reading and writing skills. (see Figure 11)

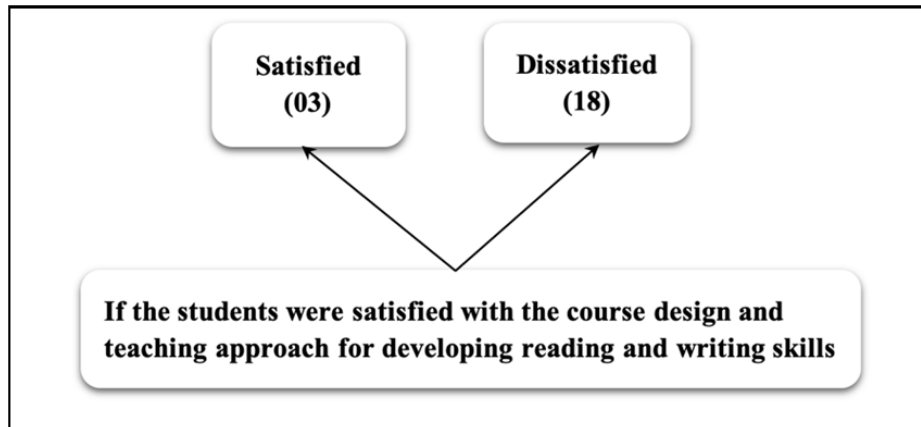


Figure 11. If the students were, after completing Honors and masters in English , satisfied with the courses design and teaching approach for developing reading and writing skills

As presented in Figure 12, about 95% of the participants as shown in the pie chart were dissatisfied with the testing system they were exposed to for developing four language skills. They mentioned the reasons why they were dissatisfied with the testing system are having no separate test for particular language skills and only memorization based testing. In contrast, 05% of the alumni were satisfied with testing system they were exposed to.

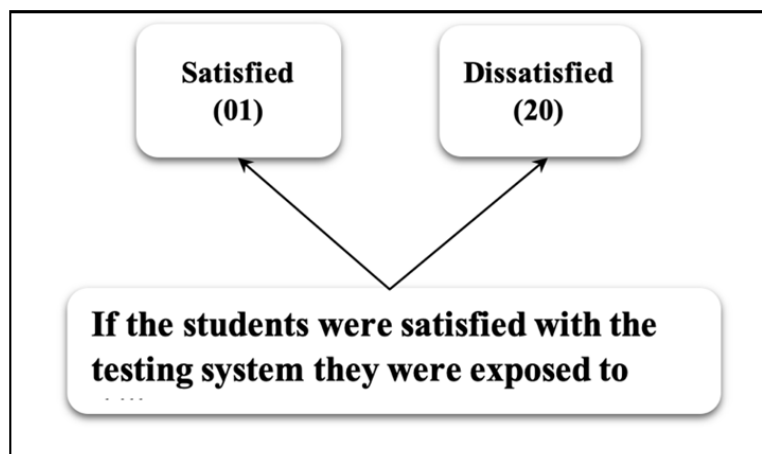


Figure 12. If the students were satisfied with the testing system they were exposed to for developing four language skills

Almost all the alumni (90%) participated in the open ended survey admitted the fact that most of the language teachers were competent but not serious in regard to conducting classes or designing the courses (Figure 13). One of the participants mentioned that most of the teachers were busy with administrative and political issues. The rest of the participant (10%) considered their teachers to be unskilled.

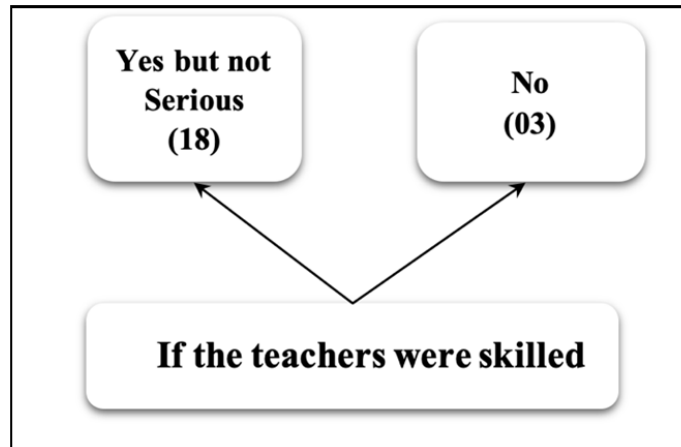


Figure 13. If the teachers were skilled

After completing graduation and post-graduation from the university, the alumni admitted their English language proficiency level, for 60% of them were, in speaking, at intermediate level while about 35% were at advanced level and only 05% of them were beginners. Again, 55% of the participants were, in listening, at intermediate level whereas 40% of them were at advanced level and 01 of the 21 participants were beginner. Likewise, 55% of the participants were, in reading, at intermediate level. In contrast, 45% of them were at advanced level. Similarly, in writing 60% of the participants were at advanced level and 40% of the alumni were at intermediate level. (see Figure 14)

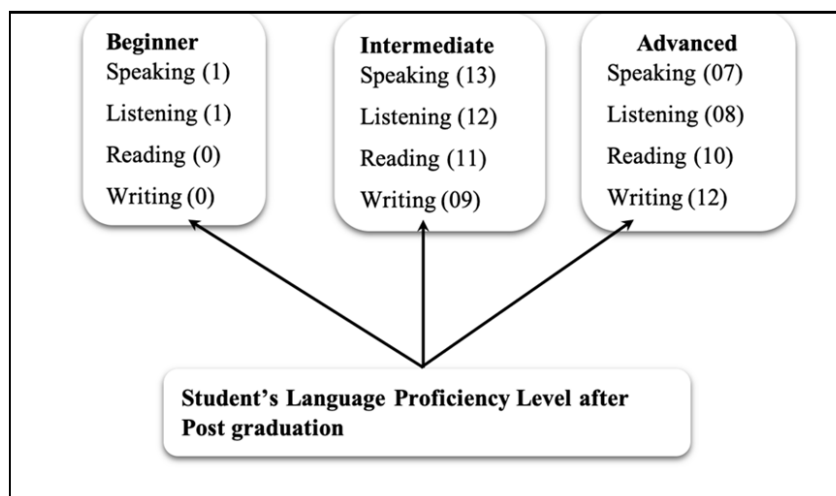


Figure 14. Student's language proficiency level after post-graduation

The modifications suggested by the participants as shown in the pie chart are, in truth, important for the English language teaching practices at the concerned university and the other public and private universities of Bangladesh. As shown in Figure 15, 35% of the alumni recommended that at least one specific course for each language skills should be included into the syllabus while 30% of them suggested that teachers should be cordial, serious, punctual, accountable, out from politics, skilled and well –trained. Likewise, 25% of the participants proposed that practice oriented courses, Blended learning, group discussion, specific test on each language skill should be taken into account whereas 20% of them advised that technology based classroom, more ELT based courses, seminar, and student's seriousness were substantial. Again, 04 of the 21 participants in the open ended survey advocated that teacher should make language teaching enjoyable by showing movies and songs and encourage students to practice English in their daily life rather to memorize. And 03 of them suggested that learner's and experienced based teaching approach with examples of real-life situation should be introduced.

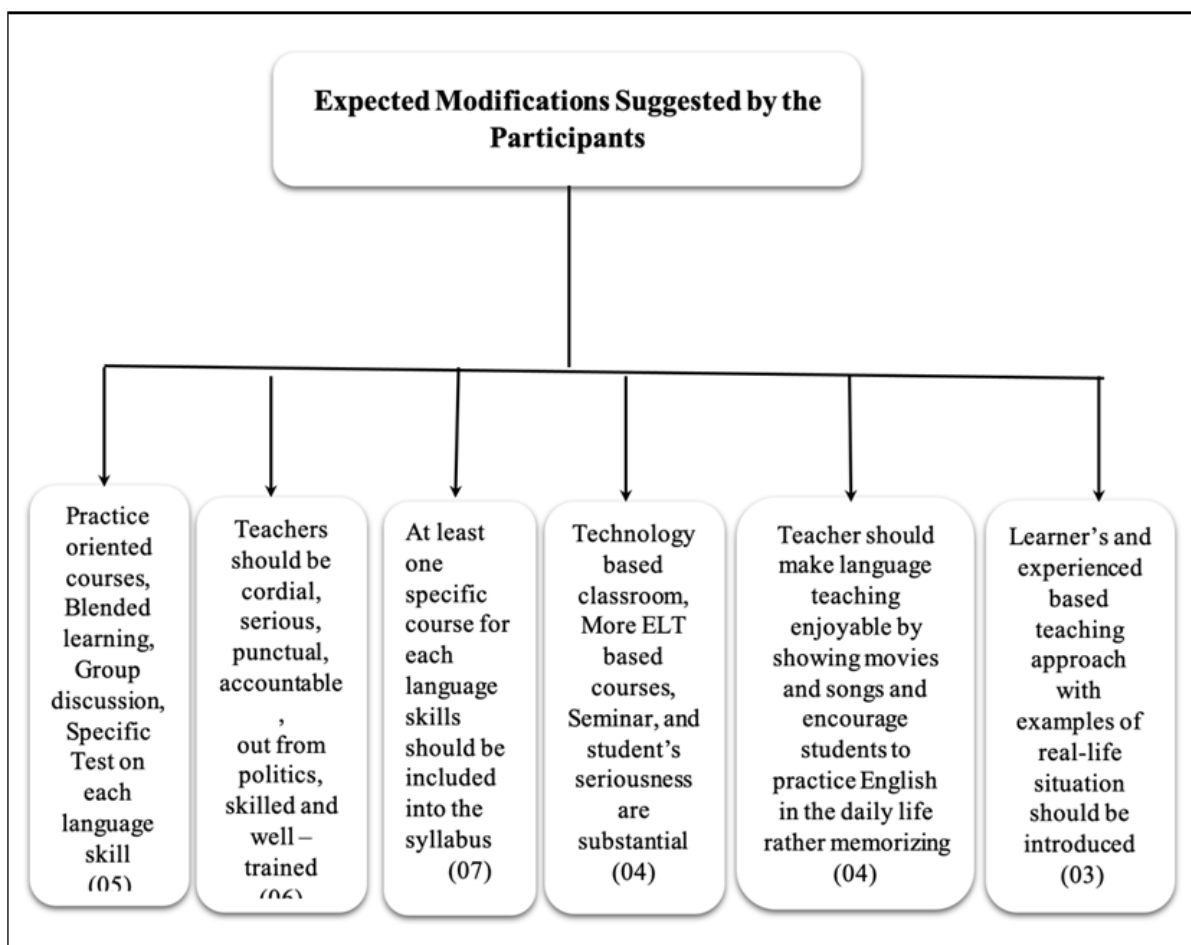


Figure 15. Expected Modifications Suggested by the Alumni

4.2. Discussion

Twelve years of the study concerning the English language teaching practices in the department of English at Islamic university, Bangladesh demonstrated that majority of the students, after completing the graduation and post-graduation in English, failed to develop their speaking, listening, reading skills at advanced level though most of them were, at the time of entrance into the university, at intermediate level and some were as beginner in all these skills while more than half of the participants successfully improve their writing skills at advanced level. This is, in truth, in contrast to their expectations. The findings also revealed that the greater number of alumni's English language proficiency achievement was the result of their personal effort rather institutional effort as they did not get much support from the program offering entity. Again, the English language courses the participants studied at university were not sufficient because there was no particular course for each language skill (Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing) and the language course design was not clear and not designed properly though some lecture based classes were conducted and some tasks were given to the students to develop their skills but all the effort exerted a very little fruitful effect on English language skills because of having no practice and feedback session. Almost all of the alumni clearly stated that language teacher normally did not use technological devices in language class though it was very indispensable to use technological devices to develop English language skills particularly speaking and listening skills. In a similar manner, the alumni were dissatisfied with the course design and teaching approach because no specific strategies and effective teaching approaches were applied to develop four English language skills (Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing). Besides, the teacher did not make any plan to execute any particular method. Having no practice session and feedback, no use of language lab and less scope for practice English in the classroom were, in fact, important causes for their dissatisfaction. The participants also mentioned the reasons why they were dissatisfied with the testing system were having no separate test for particular language skills and only memorization based testing. Lastly, the alumni admitted the fact that most of the language teachers were competent but not serious in regard to conducting classes or designing the courses. The findings meet all of the objective of the research as they explicate the nature of the English language teaching practice at a public university for more than a decade, explore the overall problems and challenges faced by students of English language learning at the university and recommend achievable considerations from the alumni's points of view to ensure pragmatic English language teaching at the universities of Bangladesh.

4.3. Recommendations

After a thorough analysis of its findings, the study offers some recommendations which might be applicable and achievable both in public university and private universities of Bangladesh and in many other countries of the world in terms of population, language teaching practices, resource capacity and academic arrangement. However, the study recommends that at least one particular course for each English language skills (Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing) should be added to the syllabus and the language teachers should be very cordial, punctual, well-trained, accountable, aloof from the political activities and serious concerning the class activities, course design and imple-

mentation of specific teaching method of second language teaching. The study also proposes that more practice oriented ELT courses, technology based classroom, seminar, Blended learning, group discussion, practice session, specific test on each language skill should be taken into account. Students must be serious in regard to the tasks given by the language teacher and practices English in the real life situation. The language teachers should make language teaching enjoyable by showing movies and songs and encourage students to practise English in their daily life rather to memorize and experienced based teaching approach with examples of real-life situation should be introduced to the students. Again, the language teachers should use technological devices to develop English language skills particularly speaking and listening skills.

4.4. Limitations

The study experienced a number of obstacles, and, it has some limitations too for sure. As the alumni lived in different places for the job purpose after the completion of their post-graduation, they for the answer of the questionnaire could not be approached in person, which resulted in the need for arduous over-phone, on-social media or on-internet communications to request and remind the responders. Besides, majority of the participants were reluctant to answer all of the research question due to, may be, their job and family related engagements, scarcity of spare time and investing time in typing. Many of them seemed hesitant to say something problematic concerning the English language practices of the department where they studied. Again, they were doubtful regarding the data collection and research work as a whole. The study also could not reach a greater number of populations for getting more representational findings.

5. Conclusion

This research aimed to identify the problems and obstacles in the English language teaching practices faced by the students for a long time (2010 to 2022) and modifications recommended by them of the department of English at a public university of Bangladesh. Based on a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the English language teaching practices in the department of English at Islamic University, Bangladesh, it can be concluded that the students are facing many problems and difficulties in English language teaching approaches. Because of these problems and obstacles the students are failing to learn English language properly. The results indicate that that majority of the students, after completing the graduation and post-graduation in English, failed to develop their speaking, listening, reading at advanced level. The findings also revealed that the greater number of alumni's English language proficiency achievement was the result of their personal effort rather institutional effort as they did not get much support from the program offering entity. Again, the English language courses the participants studied at university were not sufficient because there was no particular course for each language skill (Speaking, Listening, Reading, and Writing) and the language course design was not clear and not designed properly and all the effort exerted a very little effect on English language skills because of having no practice and feedback session, usage of technological devices in language class, separate test for particular language skills. The study suggests some recommendations which might be applicable and achievable for English department of both public and

private universities of Bangladesh and in many other countries of the world in terms of population, language teaching practices, resource capacity and academic arrangement. However, the study also recommends that at least one particular course for each English language skills should be added to the syllabus and the language teachers should be very cordial, punctual, well-trained, accountable, aloof from the political activities and serious concerning the class activities, course design and implementation of specific teaching method of second language teaching. The study also proposes that more practice oriented ELT courses, technology based classroom, seminar, Blended learning, group discussion, practice session and specific test on each language skill should be taken into account.

6. Acknowledgment

Words that I can write will be feeble to express immense gratitude to my colleague Md. Mozaffor Hossain, Head, the Department of English, Pundra University of Science & Technology, Bangladesh, for his tremendous help enabling me to understand many aspects of research practically. I am also grateful to my wife Suraiya Akter Sinigdha for her gracious comments and patience.

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